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ABSTRACT

This keynote address examines the role of the deputy principal and the stress cycle in an educational climate of uncertainty and rapid social and educational change. A profile of the "average" deputy principal is offered, and the term stress is defined. Methods of researching stress are examined. Factors that contribute to stress in school personnel are outlined, including: resources and environment, change and competing demands, meetings, staff, time use, parents, community, networks and relationships, personality and health, and self-development. The paper concludes that people work better under some degree of stress, but this degree varies according to the individual and his or her environment. Attitudes towards stress are important, as well as the development of individualized techniques and skills for managing it. (Contains 12 references.) (JDD)

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Stressed ? Who Me ?

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Keynote address to the Association of Catholic Secondary Schools Queensland (ACSSQ) Conference of Deputies and Assistant Principals - Administration "Reaching the Future" Maroochydore, 4 - 6 August, 1993.

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of your conference *Reaching the Future* is very appropriate in the current climate of uncertainty and rapid social and educational change. Within those parameters, it is fitting that your role, that of the deputy principal be examined especially in regards to stress, a concept that has almost come to be synonymous with rapid change.

Given the considerable discussion of stress at all levels from scientific journals to popular weekly magazines, I have more and more concerns about the term, its meaning and suggested responses. I would claim that there is some risk of stress becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

No doubt a number of the points presented today will not be altogether new. What I want try to do, in a relatively limited time, is to share with you some of the results of my reading and thinking while also identifying possible applications to you in your present role. One point I'd like to accent early is that I cannot identify appropriate responses for each individual. That is another task and one that cannot be dealt with in this situation.

In discussing the role of the deputy, I want to focus on the deputy principal, the notion of stress, research into deputies and stress, areas of stress and the stress cycle. However, before going further, I'd like to off some cautionary warnings.

We read about stress a lot these days, perhaps too much, because just talking about it can actually cause more stress as we try to struggle with a rapidly changing world.

Despite the considerable attention it attracts, stress remains an inexact concept in many aspects. It is also a highly politicised one, in that high levels of stress are prominent among the factors put forward by groups of professionals when making a case for improvement in their terms and conditions of employment.

Awareness of the impact of stress has grown particularly in relation to a greater concern over health issues as stress becomes manifest in individual feelings of fatigue, loss of sleep and even depression (Gaziel, 1993:67).

We also need to be very cautious in our interpretations and applications. The unconsidered application of statements taken from various sources to one's self is a far from satisfactory approach. Each case or example needs to be examined carefully and objectively. Some may or may not be applicable to a particular person - and that very point is one of my concerns with the literature which often claims easy and instantaneous results.

THE "AVERAGE" DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

Research wise, we know very little about him/her. In terms of stress, even less although teaching in general has become a fertile ground for researchers to address issues of stress levels, symptoms, types, coping strategies and even now, cross-cultural comparisons. While many of the empirical studies group the deputy with the principal and refer to "school administrators", some studies specifically refer to the deputy. They also identify potential sources of stress.

Austin and Brown (cited in Harvey, 1991:13) found an absence of job descriptions for deputies who were often at the mercy of their Principal. Two other findings are of interest: (a) They found that the deputy's day was mostly spent in intense but brief interaction with large numbers of students and teachers. Secondly, the deputy was often the person who kept things going. Such findings can be contrasted with Reay and Dennison (1990) who questioned whether being a deputy was *a real job*. The question they used in their particular research focused on who undertook their duties if a teacher, deputy or principal was absent for a day ? Their findings suggest that in the case of the deputy, no one assumed their duties thus implying that the duties were relatively unessential.

Other findings include the work of Iannoconne (cited in Harvey, 1991:13) who suggested deputies spent considerable time heading off conflict and dealing with the aftermath of conflict. Kelly (cited in Harvey, 1991:15) reported that many see the deputy role as transitional and as preparation for a principalship.

Again, Nias (1987) suggested that research portrayed deputies as powerless and ineffectual with the duality of their role (teaching and administration) creating potential ambiguities, while Ridden (cited in Harvey, 1991:15) studied the transition from teacher to deputy and identified five dimensions of change:

from teacher to manager/leader
from task orientation to goal orientation
from delegation to negotiation
from individual role to team role
from constraint to empowerment.

If we reflect on each of these for a moment, there are some major changes involved for the individual.

In his review of research, Harvey (1991) concluded that most studies are investigations of lists of duties or tasks. In relation to this particular topic, Borg and iding (1993) identified and grouped four sources of stress. They have alo separated deputy and principal into four areas to demonstrate that level of stress increases with length of experience. While their study was centred in Malta, it would offer an interesting base for further comparative studies.

It is worth noting that, not only in relation to role stress, that while there has been considerable research carried out on examining the principal's influence in a school, there has been a real dearth of parallel research in relation to influence stemming from someone in the role of the deputy.

STRESS

Before exploring the key issues, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the

term stress.

Thomas (1986) offers a useful statement:

> *One's adaptation to stressful circumstances or stressors is an individualistic phenomena. Therefore it can be conceived along a continuum; not only negative or destructive but positive or constructive.*

One comment to be made here is that stress is an essential part of our living. Who would enjoy a life without the occasional incident ?

At times I think the publicity machines get their terms wrong and in focusing on stress more accurately are referring to distress. Again, Thomas sees distress as the negative extreme of stress with physiological and psychological effects, for example, ulcers, arthritis, heart disease or behaviour disorders. This is not stress; it is the reaction to stress when the reaction becomes distress.

Several writers have taken the popularised notion of stress and in focusing on one's occupational role, have developed the idea of occupational stress. As one example, Farkas (cited in Thomas, 1986:186) referred to occupational stress as an experience arising from a perceived imbalance between work-related demands and an individual's capability, power and motivation to meet these demands, when failure to respond to them is seen as having important consequences.

In a similar vein, Levi (cited in Thomas, 1986:186) saw it present where discrepancies exist between occupational demands and opportunities on the one hand and the workers' capacities, needs and expectations on the other. He also identified four main classes of reaction

- disturbed effects (anxiety, anger, depression)
- change in motor behaviours (muscle tension, speech disturbance)
- cognitive functioning (perception, judgement, thought)

- physiological changes (heart, sweat glands, respiratory system)

Before continuing some key assumptions outlined by Dingwall (1991), are worth noting:

* Everyone is subject to stress at some time or other.
* Stress is not always a bad thing. There is 'good' stress and 'bad' stress. It is not necessarily harmful; it can help motivate us better.
* Almost anything can be identified as a cause of stress; too much work or too little work, for example.
* Identical stress factors can produce totally different, even opposite results - in plain terms, one person's stress is another's challenge.
* Stress is easier to recognise than to explain.
* Because it is *a personal condition* there are almost as many definitions of stress as there are people. The simplest definition can be the most effective, that is when 'outside' pressures (work, family problems, personal relationships, etc) get beyond our ability to cope and affect us 'inside' - this causes mental or physical stress. This is stress.
* It is not the amount of stress we have that matters, it is how we handle it.
* Awareness is 90% of the solution to the successful management of stress. Accepting that it exists and learning to handle it responsibly are what count.
* Everyone has the ability to resist stress, in both the short term (survival) and the long term (learning techniques and skills).

RESEARCH AND STRESS

The issue of research itself into stress has received attention. Ross Thomas (1986) expressed concern that data is often dependent on self-report questionnaires and that often the researchers failed to recognise occupation stress as apart from that stress attributable to life events. This raises the question of whether occupational stress is able to be separated from one's daily

social and psychological environment. The answer must be no. Despite advice about leaving work problems at work, I would suggest that most of us find it difficult not to take some work pressure back to our after-work situations and vice-versa.

In examining a similar question, Hiebart and Farber (1984) identified four distinct categories of teacher/stress papers:

(70%)	Type 1	No data base; essentially statements about stress and teaching.
(21%)	Type 2	Includes data in support of claim with data derived from self-report questionnaires
(6%)	Type 3	Includes data in support of claim with data provided by third party resources
(3%)	Review	Summaries and/or synthesis of extant publications.

What is interesting is that they found so many Type 1 category examples that they stopped tabulation of them.

In a similar vein, Thomas (1986) warned that in spite of the proficiency of publications dealing with the theme, uncertainty still exists with regard to the severity and incidence of stress among deputies.

Some of the problems remain with delineating a strong operational definition. The precise measurement of stress in its various forms has been bedevilled by methodological problems. This alone suggests a need for careful reading and interpretation of articles on stress.

In exploring the methodological problems a little more, two points are made:

- We are all aware of stress as a concept but also have our own understanding, interpretation and hence framework for identifying what "we believe" are the symptoms and effects. In reality, that process may or may not be accurate especially in relation to others.

- From experience it is highly likely that we have a perception or appreciation that specific occupational roles attract a form of stress relative to the nature of that particular role. Here we can compare pilots, doctors, surgeons, and police but need to acknowledge that stress is likely to emerge in particular situations but specific to that role. I think at times this situational aspect is overlooked.

So how does one measure and what is one measuring ? There are two alternatives:

1. Subjectively: By asking questions of people, for example, do you feel stressed today ? or Rate your level of stress on a 1 - 10 scale ? As suggested such an approach has inherent problems.

2. Objectively: Through the use of measuring apparatus to monitor heart beat or breathing rate. Such an approach while giving a measurement cannot measure the cognitive effect nor the long term and/or damaging side effects ?

Either approach has limitations but both point towards a tension for the individual deputy. The individual is a unique functioning machine with his/her own internal configuration but that individual has to interact with a social environment which, in terms of its effects on him/her, cannot be ignored. We are all aware of sudden bizarre situations where something has just acted as the *final trigger* to cause someone's behaviour to become unpredictable.

This leads to another aspect of stress and teachers. Some of the often quoted "identifiers" of high levels of stress are absence, resignations or retirement

(O'Leary, 1993:6). I would suggest that the basis of such claims are highly suspect. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that they will continue to be made.

THE DEPUTY AND STRESS

Many of the studies carried out focus on occupational stress, that is, comparing one occupation with another or trying to identify what factors are unique to a particular occupation to create stress.

As one example, Dunham (1992) identified for the deputy the following role conflicts through being *a piggy in the middle*, for example,

. head wants changes, staff resistance
. expectations differ
. intermediary between various interests, lobbies and disputants
. deputy attempts to resolve demands of day-to-day and need for long-term planning
. integration of different expectations (member of staff or senior staff)
. balance of time between teaching and administrative role
. demand to act as intermediary or negotiator
. multiplicity of tasks

This raises the question of what is in a school that contributes to stress. Jury, Willover and De Lacy (cited in Thomas, 1986:187) offer a succinct summary:

> *Schools are characterised by vague and diverse goals, ambiguous criteria of success, lack of a widely accepted technology of teaching, a mandated relationship with clients who may or may not be willing participants, high population density, stimulus overload, especially for teachers, a host of logistical problems, and political vulnerability.*

DEMANDS / STRESSORS

The sources of stress in a school have been well pin-pointed by Dingwall (1991). These include

Resources and environment
Change and competing demands
Meetings
Staff
Time Use
Parents
Community
Networks and Relationships
Personality and Health
Self-Development

It is worth examining each of these a little more:

1. Resources and Environment

One of the most consistent sources of dissatisfaction and stress is poor working conditions. Frustration, poor environment and limited facilities affect not only inter-personal relationships between staff but also one's opportunity to partake of short relaxing breaks.

2. Change and Competing Demands

Most are aware of the effects of change. Some changes are seen as positive and supportive, others negative and threatening. Coupled with this change process, demands often increase or may be in conflict with each other. Change is often resisted, and for it to be successful there has to be a willingness to accept change, as well as people to act as change agents.

Our immediate response to increased demands made upon us is to increase our performance and efficiency to a peak. Any further increase at this point results

in rapid decline in performance as a result of the overload. Frequently, however, people are not aware of this until it is too late, and fatigue, exhaustion and ultimate mental or physical breakdown can occur (sometimes referred to as "burn out").

3. Meetings

Meetings often constitute one of the biggest time-wasters in management generally. Many are a total disaster, both in terms of their content and return for effort. Ironically, many people are aware of this problem but appear reluctant to take action to modify or change the status quo.

4. Staff

Stress occurs when teachers feel unable to cope with the workload, have no clear ideas concerning their role, feel undervalued or feel unable to use their skills to the full in an effective organisation. Too many blurred edges, too many trivial demands and uncertainties as to expectations and responsibilities, contribute to confusion and add up to increased stress.

5. Time Use

Bad or inefficient use of time is a major source of stress for most deputies - as it is for most managers. Time management is vital. Few people analyse the way they use their time. Essentially, time management enables a person to take control over *how* they spend their time. By doing so they can make sensible choices about how that time is used so that:

* the best use is made of time
* problems caused by work overload can be dealt with

advantage can be taken of opportunities.

In order to manage time effectively we must continually be aware of what we are trying to achieve and *what stands in the way* of achieving it. To make sound decisions about time we need to think about *objectives* and *priorities,* distinguishing between what is *important* and what is *urgent.*

6. Parents

Often there is a need to objectively examine some of the problems and difficulties which occur in home-school and parent-teacher relations, and ways in which these can be improved. Parents are an integral part of the education process and must be acknowledged as such despite the often negative side of the teacher-parent relationship.

7. Community

School-community activities can take an excessive amount of time. They are also important in terms of school image. In some situations there is community pressure, as well as strong expectations, for school staff to participate. Obviously there is a need for a balance and respects for one's skills and interests.

8. Networks and Relationships

'Networking' has become a major concept within management studies. We all have 'networks', groups of people to which we belong or with which we relate. Many of these networks involve our families and friends, others involve work colleagues or professional associations. Any one, or a number, of these networks can be helpful in coping with a stressful situation.

On the other hand, networks can also increase stress levels, especially if there is a conflict of interest between them, or individuals become overdependent on a particular network. Some networks may make excessive demands on individuals which s/he may find difficult to resist.

9. Personality and Health

Some people work better under pressure. Others find it difficult to cope with even the slightest increase of stress. Some people are fit and healthy and never have time off work. Others are frequently absent or taking sick-leave as a result of stress related symptoms. Some people fail to recognise stress either in themselves or others but some acknowledge that they can make life more

stressful for other people, even though not stressed themselves.

It is now recognised that personality has a considerable bearing on the way we respond to pressures, and that we all have different stress thresholds- the levels at which we react to stressors. Recent research has also put greater emphasis on the way we live, the life-style we follow and in particular the way we eat and drink, sleep and exercise.

The ability to recognise the danger signals for stress in others as well as ourselves cannot be overemphasised.

10. Self-development

Self-development is about self-awareness. To handle stress one needs to take active steps in recognising the stressors and seeking appropriate coping mechanisms. Part of this process is care of one's own self-development.

There are three key questions in any self-development analysis which should be considered:

Who am I ?
Where am I now ?
Where do I want to go ?

We all need to spend some time reflecting on one's whole life and recalling major achievements as well as disappointments. Each of us needs to consider their priorities: the things that are most important to us at our present stage of life. Unless they are actively involved, boredom or frustration can set in and increase levels of both mental and physical stress. One should monitor personal growth and development on a regular basis, set themselves realistic set of goals or objectives and assess their own values.

As mentioned, the recognition of these stressors can help in developing an

appropriate coping mechanism.

COPING

What is important is our attitude towards stress. "It is not the amount of stress you have, but how you handle it" said the late Hans Selye, the Canadian pioneer of studies into stress. Most of us handle the short-term; it's often the long-term kind that gives us trouble. In our working lives our successes and achievements depend almost entirely on our ability to manage the level of stress with which we are confronted. As a deputy you are aware that stress exists; what you need is to find and develop your own individual techniques and skills for managing it.

Dewe (1985) suggests that in dealing with stressful situations, we need to make two appraisals (a) what is at stake ? and (b) what can we do about it ? The whole coping process takes place over time, and as coping actions influence our appraisal of the situation so will our appraisal influence how we cope. Thus, when the time dimension is introduced, deciding whether a strategy is problem-solving or regulating emotions, is difficult.

Research confirms that choosing a coping mode is significantly attached to the source of the occupational stress. *Here again, research indicates that the coping is so often individual, whether it be action, retreat, response, or recognition.*

SUMMARY

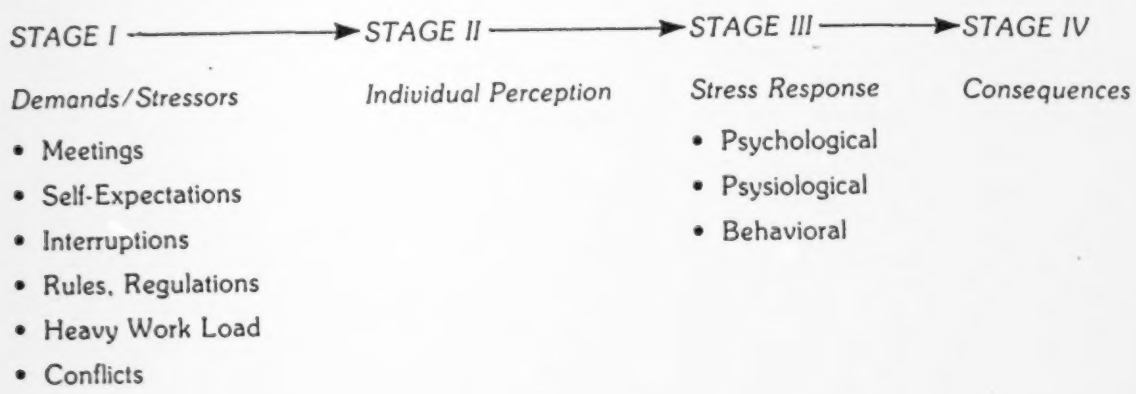
In a relatively brief overview, I've touched on various aspects of the deputy and stress and hopefully highlighted some worthwhile points for you to reflect and ponder on during the next few days. At the same time true justice has not been given to the many aspects of the tensions in the role of deputy principal.

As suggested earlier, we all work better under some degree of stress. At the

same time, that degree varies according to the individual and their environment. It is difficult to identify one's optimal level for all occasions. As mentioned in my opening comments, we are living in a time of rapid change. We all need to recognise our own functioning and coping styles.

In offering one alternative, I'd like to suggest that we ignore the notion of stress and perhaps focus on those factors which are having a negative influence on our capability to fulfil each of our roles. Perhaps even more importantly we need to keep in mind the stress cycle identified by Gmelch and Swent (1984:194):

Figure 1 Stress Cycle*



Given the effect of change, perhaps it is most appropriate to close with a stress prayer which many people attribute to St Francis:

> O Lord, give me the patience to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

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